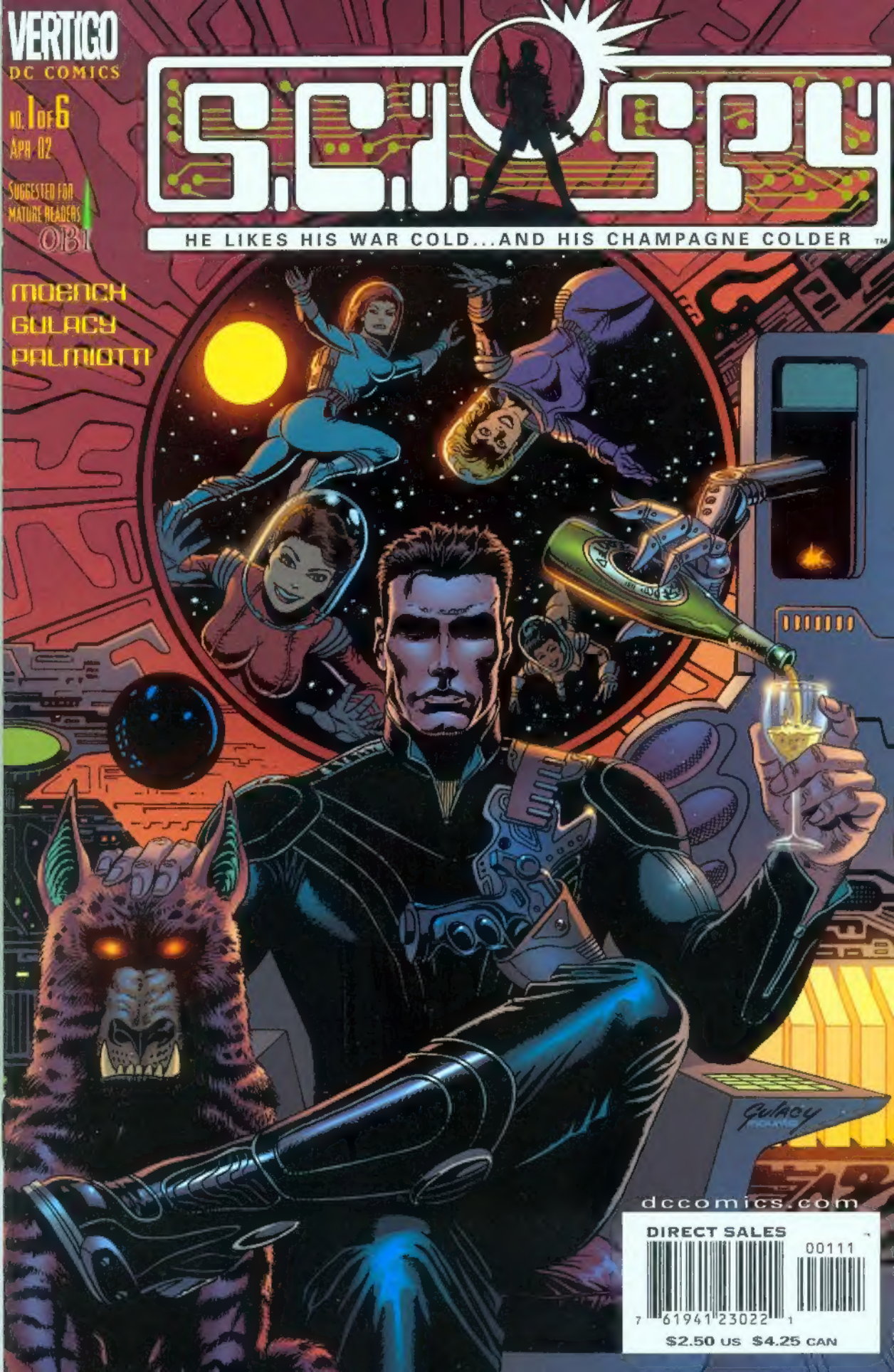
VERTIGO
DC COMICS
NO. 1 OF 6
APR 02
SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS
O31
S.E.I. SPY
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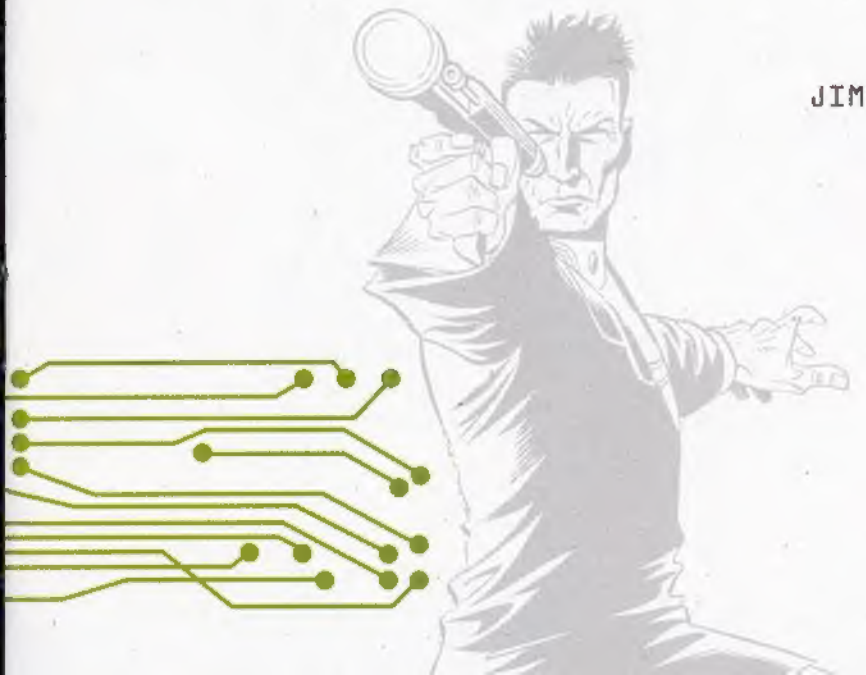

From the Mother Bank Auxiliary File: EarthArcturus.6138.09

<One thousand years after the destruction of Earth, the remnants of humanity found refuge on 17 planets in the Arcturus System (see supplementary file: Arcturus System: rlyf-mothbank.arcturus-xb04-mx[172.20.105.105])>

<Only 5 of the 17 planets have been fully Terraformed to ideal human living conditions. The other 12 planets -- the Outer Worlds -- have achieved only partial Terraforming to marginal life-sustenance levels. This is seen as oppressive by most of the Outer Worlds and has been the cause of consistent tension throughout the last 50 years (Old Earth Standard)(see sup. file: chronoearth.time (smxG.mothbank.earthstandard.cgh\S) [22.657.998])>

<All attempts to defuse the situations have only led to further escalation and outbursts. Previous protests and riots have begun to flare into overt terrorism and sabotage, threatening the entire Arcturus System's safety. The militant fundamentalist ShadowBlack (see sup. file: ShadowBlack [sXdwblk.mothbank.shadowblack.qa.idreqc]) is suspected to be behind recent attacks and is likely funded by Outer World Authorities.

<S.C.I-SPY agent involvement necessary to avoid further escalation.[Query: srchrslt-mothbank.agent.yed.idreqc]>
<Implement immediate search: S.C.I.-SPY agent database.>
<Searching..
<Searching..
<Searching..

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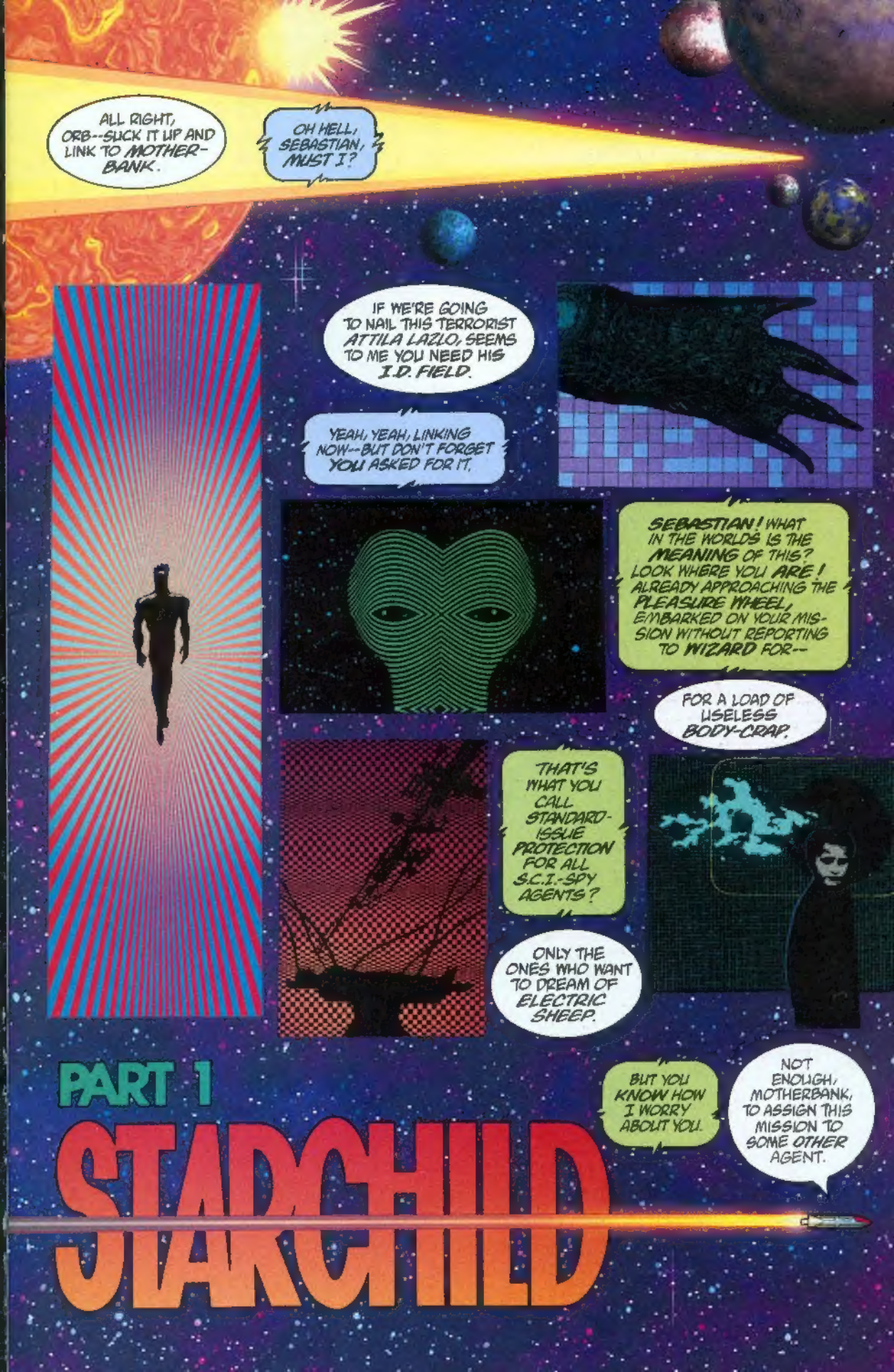

ALL RIGHT, ORB--SUCK IT UP AND LINK TO MOTHER-BANK.
OH HELL, SEBASTIAN, MUST I?
IF WE'RE GOING TO NAIL THIS TERRORIST ATTILA LAZLO, SEEMS TO ME YOU NEED HIS I.D. FIELD.
YEAH, YEAH, LINKING NOW--BUT DON'T FORGET YOU ASKED FOR IT.
SEBASTIAN! WHAT IN THE WORLDS IS THE MEANING OF THIS? LOOK WHERE YOU ARE! ALREADY APPROACHING THE PLEASURE WHEEL, EMBARKED ON YOUR MISSION WITHOUT REPORTING TO WIZARD FOR--
FOR A LOAD OF USELESS BODY-CRAP.
THAT'S WHAT YOU CALL STANDARD-ISSUE PROTECTION FOR ALL S.C.I.-SPY AGENTS?
ONLY THE ONES WHO WANT TO DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP.
BUT YOU KNOW HOW I WORRY ABOUT YOU.
NOT ENOUGH, MOTHERBANK, TO ASSIGN THIS MISSION TO SOME OTHER AGENT.
PART 1
STARCHILD

I'M REFERRING TO YOUR STUBBORN FLESH-FURE ATTITUDE, SEBASTIAN, YOUR REFUSAL TO PROTECT YOURSELF WITH ANY ARTIFICIAL ENHANCEMENTS WHATSOEV--

IT'S CALLED STAYING HUMAN--BEING REAL.

AND REMEMBER, MOTHERBANK, YOU'RE NOT MY MOTHER.

I'M THE CLOSEST THING YOU HAVE, SEBASTIAN, THE ONE WHO RAISED YOU, TRAINED YOU, SHAPED YOU.

AND SINCE I'M ALSO YOUR BOSS, I COULD ORDER YOU TO OBEY--

AND I WOULD QUIT AGAIN--AND RETIRE TO A LIFE AS THE MOST MYSTERIOUS ORPHAN IN THE THOUSAND-YEAR HISTORY OF THE SYSTEM.

IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT?

OF COURSE NOT! AS A "MOTHER," I'D LOSE MY "SON"--AND AS THE HEAD OF S.C.I.-SPY, I'D LOSE MY BEST AGENT.

THEN DROP IT, MOTHERBANK, AND GIVE ME THE DESTINATION CAPSULE-SPECS.

IF I'D KNOWN THAT THE FROZEN BABY I FOUND FLOATING IN SPACE WOULD MATURE INTO THE MOST STUBBORN--

THE SPECS, DAMMIT.

OH, ALL RIGHT--BUT DAMMIT YOURSELF! "ORBITING NEUTRAL XENON BETWEEN THE INNER AND OUTER PLANETS, THE PLEASURE WHEEL OFFERS THREE THOUSAND CASINOS, THEATERS, BORDELLOS, DRUG DENS, SENSORY-JACK CHAMBERS, BLOODSPORT ARENAS, AND WHATEVER ELSE THE JADED HEART CRAVES." MORE?

NO. JUST RELEASE ORB FROM THE CONTROL PANEL--ANTIGRAV ACTIVATED.

BLEEP

POKT

ORB FREE AND CLEAR, SEBASTIAN.

ATTUNE MORPHIC RESONANCE DETECTOR TO THE LIFE-FIELD FREQUENCY OF ATTILA LAZLO.

ZEET

DONE, SEBASTIAN; ORB EQUIPPED TO SEEK TARGET, BUT NOW--

NOW SHUT UP, MOTHER-BANK.

SWITCH TO ORB'S NEUTRAL VOICE--AND LET ME WORK.

CASINO

WELCOME TO THE PLEASURE WHEEL, SIR! WE INVITE YOU TO SAMPLE ALL OUR DARK DELIGHTS, SINNING THE ENTIRE CIRCUIT!
I'LL DO MY WORST...
...BUT I PREFER A SHORTCUT TO THE ACTION.
RED SCORES! THE CHAMPIONSHIP IS NOW TIED WITH LESS THAN TWO MINUTES REMAINING!
VISITOR
4
HOME
4
SCAN THE CROWD, ORB--CONSTANT FEED TO THE WRIST-WATCHER.
GIVEN THE INTELL REPORT ABOUT LAZLO'S ADDICTION TO THIS GAME, IT'S A GOOD BET HE'S HERE SOMEWHERE.
TEK

CLEAR FEED--KEEP SCANNING.
DEET
MORPHIC FIELD DETECTED--HOVERING OVER ATTILA LAZLO NOW.
I SEE YOU, ORB.
COVER WHATEVER PLAY I LAY DOWN.
I'M BORED, ATTILA-HUNKIE.
WHY DON'T WE--
SPICE THE ACTION WITH A LAST-SECOND WAGER?
Eh--?
TIED SCORE WITH TIME RUNNING OUT AND BLUE HAS POSSESSION.
MY BETS ON BLUE--THREE TO ONE IN YOUR FAVOR.
TEN THOUSAND?
THIRTY-THOUSAND PAYOUT FOR ME--A SIZEABLE LOSS...
"...UNLESS THE RED GOALSMAN SHOULD BE OUTMANEUVERED."
FASHT

WHA--?
MY EYES!
SHOOFF
CAN'T SEE--!
A SCORE AS TIME RUNS OUT!
GOAL
BLUE WINS!
AS, IT SEEMS, DO I.
I DON'T HAVE IT HERE.
THEN INVITE ME TO YOUR SUITE FOR A DRINK.
ESCORTED BY MY BODY-GUARD?
SUIT YOURSELF, BUT I'M ONLY INTERESTED IN WHAT I'VE WON--NOT IN YOUR BODY.
BY THE WAY, YOU'RE ATTILA LAZLO, AREN'T YOU?
WHOEVER I AM, I DON'T RECALL KNOWING YOU.
SEBASTIAN STARCHILD.
NEVER HEARD OF YOU.
I KNOW.

PHAEDRA, BUILD ME A DRINK.
AND ONE FOR MR. STARCHILD?
NOPE--HE'D ONLY SPILL IT ON THE CARPET...
...AFTER HE'S GUTTED.
KZHZHZHZHZHZHZHZH
SCHARK
AHRRR!
A BODYGUARD WITH NO HEART GUARDS NOTHING.
THIS IS A TESLA-9 AND YOU'RE ATTILA LAZLO, HEADED FOR INNER WORLD PRIMUS ON WHAT UNKNOWN BUSINESS?
I...YOU... I'M A COURIER FOR SHADOW BLACK...BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER.
WHY NOT?
SNA

BECAUSE, YOU IDIOT, YOU FORGOT THE CROC-CLAWED CREAMPUFF!
ORB!
GONNA BANG BOREDOM BIG!
BUHKUSH
NO HEART, NO MORPHIC FIELD, NO LIFE. WARNING: PROBABLE ROBOT.
AGHK!
TH-THANKS FOR THE...
BLASH
...T-TIMELY UPDATE.

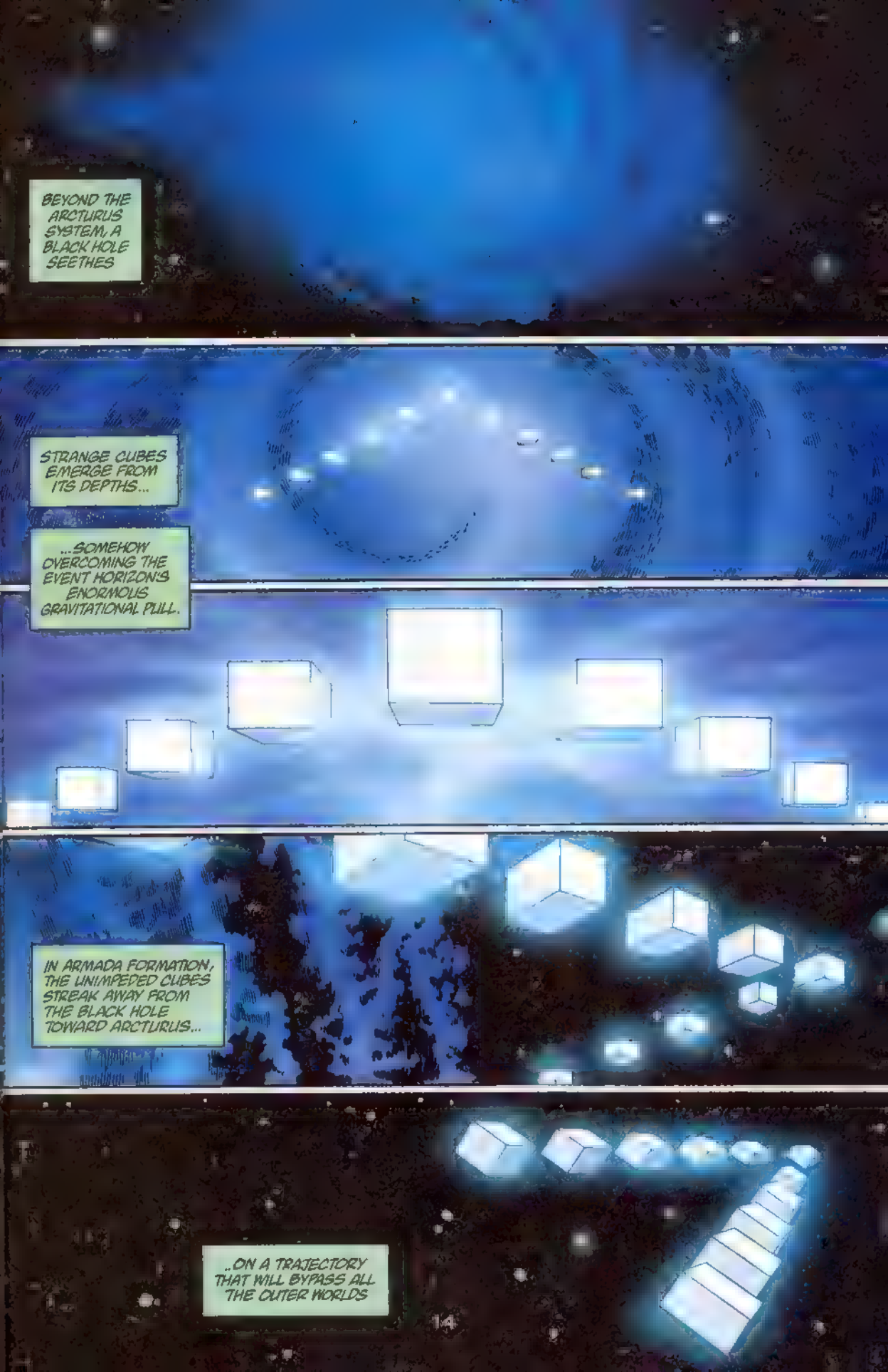
UNABLE TO LOCATE THE SYNTH-BITCH'S VITAL CORE.
THEN STOP LOOKING, ORB, BEFORE YOU LOCATE ME!
I'LL FIND THE DAMN CORE ON MY OWN!
OH, REALLY? GIVEN THE ROBOT'S NONSTANDARD DESIGN, HOW WILL YOU--
CHUN
POK
CHUN CHUN CHUN
PERSISTENCE
NOW SCAN HER, ORB
LEFT EYE INCONGRUOUS, COMPOSED OF UNKNOWN SUBSTANCE
NO! DON'T TOUCH IT!

TKT
CH-KK
WHY NOT, LAZLO?
WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?
PLEKT
WHAT'S INSIDE THE EYE?
COME ON, LAZLO, HELP ME SEE.
TELL ME WHY YOUR CROC-CLAWED CREAMPUFF WAS--
LAZLO?
WEE-HAH!
ZHAK
EXPENDABLE
SPRAKSH
CHUN CHUN CHUN
HMFF?
THIS ROUTE CLEAR--
--ALL THE WAY TO THE DOCKED SLIVER.
SLIVER, YES-- DOCK, NO

SLIVER!
COME!
SIR?
FSHSHSH
WRONG WAY, SIR! PLEASURE WHEEL POLICY FORBIDS UNAUTHORIZED SPACECRAFT INSIDE ANY SINNING AREAS!
PURSUIT DETECTED
YOU HAD TO PROBE?
ALL RIGHT, SLIVER, LET'S BOLT.
. BEFORE THEY SNATCH THAT SHUTTLE.
LOOK AT THE STONES ON THAT SKIN-PURE BASTARD! HE'S JAMMING DEEPER INTO THE WHEEL!
SHUTTLE
YAAAH

PURSUIT CRAFT
PRECISELY, ORB--AND WHEN THEY'RE RIGHT WHERE WE WANT THEM.
NOW, SLIVER.
LIT
ZHAK
SHUTTLE
MORPH DOWN.
KUTCH-LITCH-LITCH
KLATCH
BULLET-MODE--AT THE OUTER HULL
KSHUNK
STAY ON HIM!
I AM ON HIM, BUT WHERE DOES HE THINK HE'S--
uh-oh

PLEASURE WHEEL OXYGEN INTEGRITY GUARANTEED FAILSAFE WITHIN FIVE SECONDS
RESEALED! IT WAS A TRAP! SWERVE BEFORE--
PURSUIT TERMINATED.
NO BULLET-MODE, ORB--NOT IN AN OPEN SHUTTLE
LOCK A NEW COURSE, SLIVER--HOMEBASE TESSERACT.
AND HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU. .
SOON


BEYOND THE ARCTURUS SYSTEM, A BLACK HOLE SEETHES
STRANGE CUBES EMERGE FROM ITS DEPTHS...
...SOMEHOW OVERCOMING THE EVENT HORIZON'S ENORMOUS GRAVITATIONAL PULL.
IN ARMADA FORMATION, THE UNIMPEDED CUBES STREAK AWAY FROM THE BLACK HOLE TOWARD ARCTURUS...
..ON A TRAJECTORY THAT WILL BYPASS ALL THE OUTER WORLDS

HOMEBASE VECTORED DEAD AHEAD
ENTERING TESSERACT--
--NOW
SHREEEEEPT
WEATHER REPORT: MONOTONOUSLY IDEAL--AS USUAL.
YOU'RE UNDERLINING THE OBVIOUS AGAIN, ORB.
MY JOB.
BABY! HUG ME, BABY!
AND YOU LEFT THE DAMN HOLOS ON
WITH YOU, I GET LONELY.
GET REAL, ORB--AND TO HELL WITH VIRTUAL.

WHEN YOU HIDE YOURSELF INSIDE A PRIVATE TESSERACT, LONELINESS IS A GIVEN.
IT'S WHAT I'VE CHOSEN
I AM ALONE HERE
YOU THINK SO, DO YOU?
WHAT ARE YOU--
ROWF
SCHLAP
DOWN, BOY!
JUST FOR THAT, ORB, SHIFT BACK TO MOTHERBANK.
NOW YOU'RE A GLUTTON FOR NAGGING?
UNFINISHED BUSINESS
LET'S FINISH IT
GOOD WORK, SEBASTIAN BUT I ALMOST DIED WHEN THAT ROBOT-BITCH JUMPED ON YOUR--
YOU ARE DEAD, MOTHERBANK, AND I'M SENDING YOU A PRESENT
YOUR SAFE RETURN IS GIFT ENOUGH, AND--
THE ROBOT-BITCH'S LEFT EYEBALL
HAVE IT ANALYZED --THE SUBATOMIC WORKS
YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT IS, SEBASTIAN?
HEEM
I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT IT IS, MOTHERBANK.
THEN WHAT?
SOMETHING MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE
16

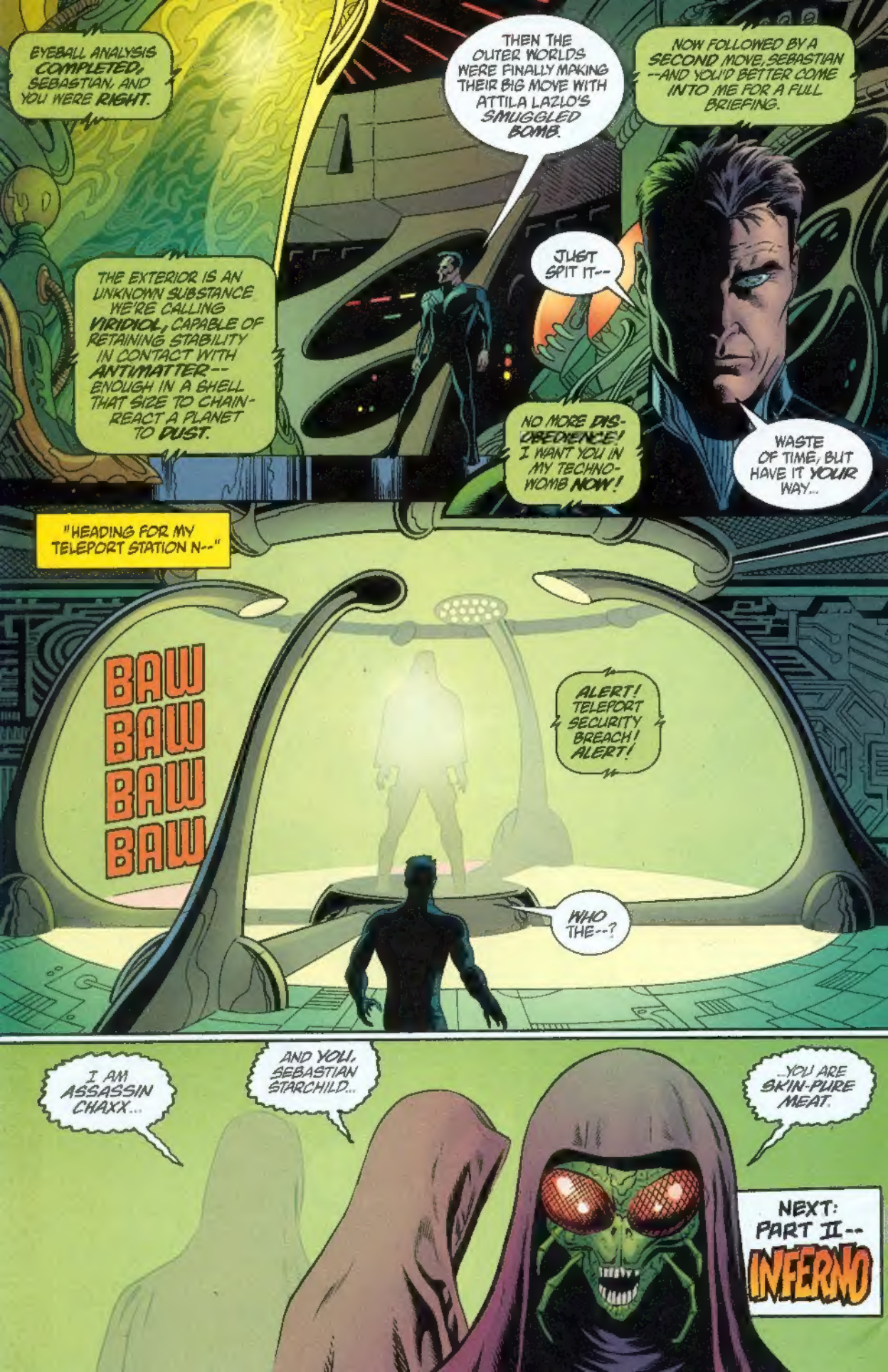
THE BORDER ZONE BETWEEN THE INNER AND OUTER PLANETS OF ARCTURUS
UNAUTHORIZED OBJECTS INTRUDING ON PROTECTED SPACE; ORIGIN UNKNOWN
NO RESPONSE TO CHALLENGE; INTERCEPT AND ANNIHILATE
TRIGGERED BY THE MYSTERY CUBES, INNER WORLDS DEFENSE SATELLITES UNLEASH A WITHERING BARRAGE OF PARTICLE BEAMS.
UTTERLY UNSCATHED, THE CUBES CONTINUE ONWARD ..
..FINALLY BREAKING FORMATION TO SEEK SCATTERED TARGETS ON THE INHABITED INNER WORLDS.

S.C.I.-SPY TRACKING STATION NINE ON INNER WORLD PRIMUS:
INCOMING-- SOUTHEAST QUADRANT, SECTOR FIVE.
THEN THE SENSORS DID NOT MALFUNCTION.
WHATEVER THE OBJECTS ARE, THEY REALLY DID PENETRATE THE SATELLITE DEFENSE GRID.
BETTER HAVE IT CHECKED AT IMPACT.
WHO'S OUR BEST AGENT ON WATCH?
"NO CONTEST-- ISIS NILE."
"ALL RIGHT, TELL HER TO--"
"SHE'S WAY AHEAD OF US--ALREADY SCRAMBLED EN ROUTE."
"NO NEED.."
SCHAOWWW

THE SOUTHEAST JUNGLE:
HMM?
KRUMPSH
CH-KLTCH
KRSHSHSHSHSHSHSH
A... CUBE?
WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE WHAT'S IN MY MOUTH?
WH-WHAT?

YOUR MOUTH?
IT HUNGERS FOR YOU.
SPLEETCH
N-NO...!
KRK KRK KRK KRK
KRK KRK KRK KRK
YAAAIIIIIIIIIEEE
KRK KRK KRK KRK KRK KRK KRK KRK KRK
KLAKA-LAKA-KAK!
KRK KRK KRK KRK KRK KRK

NANOTECH FEED-AND-MULTIPLY CYCLE INITIATED.
KRK-ETCH
MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.
KRK KRK KRK KRK KRK
BUH-
BAOUM
AGENT NILE TO TRACKING STATION NINE!
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE THIS...
...BUT WE'VE JUST BEEN INVADED BY WHAT SEEMS TO BE...FEEDER-BREEDER BUGS.
VERY HUNGRY BUGS.
MAYBE EVEN...WORLD EATERS.


EYEBALL ANALYSIS COMPLETED, SEBASTIAN, AND YOU WERE RIGHT.
THE EXTERIOR IS AN UNKNOWN SUBSTANCE WE'RE CALLING VIRIDIOL, CAPABLE OF RETAINING STABILITY IN CONTACT WITH ANTIMATTER-- ENOUGH IN A SHELL THAT SIZE TO CHAIN-REACT A PLANET TO DUST.
THEN THE OUTER WORLDS WERE FINALLY MAKING THEIR BIG MOVE WITH ATTILA LAZLO'S SMUGGLED BOMB.
JUST SPIT IT--
NOW FOLLOWED BY A SECOND MOVE, SEBASTIAN --AND YOU'D BETTER COME INTO ME FOR A FULL BRIEFING.
NO MORE DISOBEDIENCE! I WANT YOU IN MY TECHNO-WOMB NOW!
WASTE OF TIME, BUT HAVE IT YOUR WAY...
"HEADING FOR MY TELEPORT STATION N--"
BAW BAW BAW BAW
ALERT! TELEPORT SECURITY BREACH! ALERT!
WHO THE--?
I AM ASSASSIN CHAXX...
AND YOU, SEBASTIAN STARCHILD...
...YOU ARE SKIN-PURE MEAT.
NEXT: PART II-- INFERNO